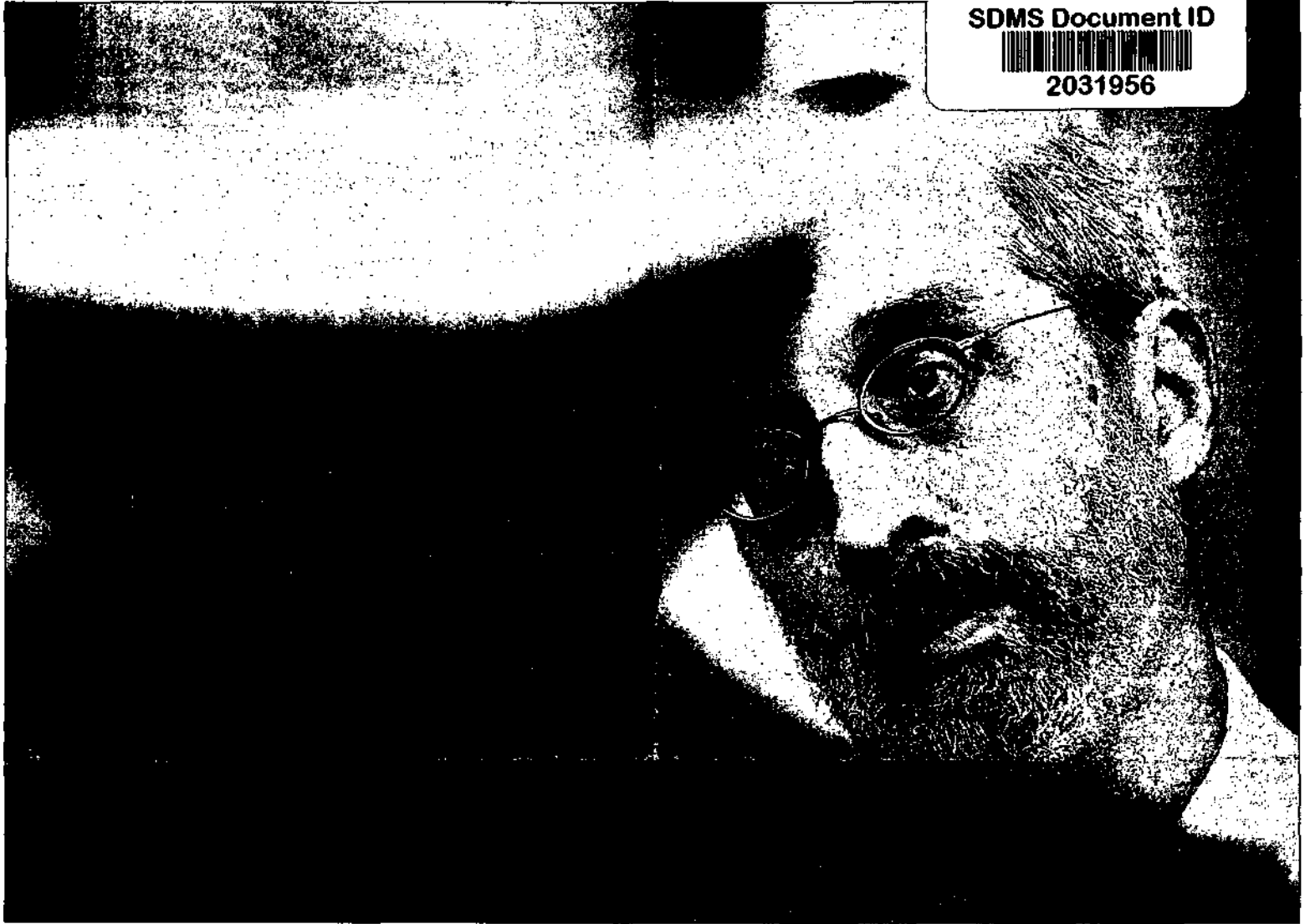


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**Barry Castleman, right,** talks with Libby resident Les Skramstad Monday afternoon after Castleman's lecture at the University of Montana on the history of asbestos. Skramstad, a former employee of the now defunct W.R. Grace and Co. vermiculite mine in Libby, was diagnosed with asbestosis in 1996.

# Asbestos exposed

*Despite long-known health risks, use of mineral continues today, expert says*

By **BETSY COHEN**  
of the Missoulian

The deadly consequence of asbestos exposure is not a modern-day human health discovery, it's been a 100-year-old problem known to manufacturers of asbestos and to the physicians who treated asbestos factory workers, said Barry Castleman, an international asbestos expert.

Despite the countless number of people who have died from diseases caused by asbestos exposure, and despite

have rigged, manipulated and concealed information about the mineral to intentionally mislead the public, he said.

Furthermore, the industry has pushed its agenda upon government agencies for decades, forcing and cajoling officials to divert scrutiny of the substance, he said during a Monday afternoon lecture at the University of Montana.

On many levels, the industry continues its tradition of shaping current government response and

course on the history of asbestos in the United States.

At the turn of the century, the substance was touted by the industry as the "magic mineral," and was used in everything from socks to paper products to insulation.

Advertising campaigns were filled with promise and glowing praise for asbestos-made products. "Protect your feet by wearing patent asbestos socks," read one such advertisement.

No one heeded the U.K. Lady Inspectors of Factories, who in 1898

of Johns-Manville, a leading American manufacturer of asbestos floor covering, died of "phthisis pulmonalis" — asbestosis — in 1898.

By 1918, there were so many asbestos-related deaths, Castleman said, U.S. life insurance companies declined to insure asbestos workers, and government surveys taken between 1930 and 1938 revealed that 25 percent to 50 percent of asbestos factory workers had asbestosis, a crippling, deadly disease that attacks the function of peoples' lungs and



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Barry Castleman, right, talks with Libby resident Les Skramstad Monday afternoon after Castleman's lecture at the University of Montana on the history of asbestos. Skramstad, a former employee of the now defunct W.R. Grace and Co. vermiculite mine in Libby, was diagnosed with asbestosis in 1996.

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Despite the countless number of people who have died from diseases caused by asbestos exposure, and despite scientific studies that pointedly reveal asbestos as toxic to humans, asbestos remains a public health problem.

Each year, Castleman said, more than 10,000 Americans die from asbestos-related diseases.

Why?

Because for the past century, executives in the asbestos industry

have rigged, manipulated and concealed information about the mineral to intentionally mislead the public, he said.

Furthermore, the industry has pushed its agenda upon government agencies for decades, forcing and cajoling officials to divert scrutiny of the substance, he said during a Monday afternoon lecture at the University of Montana.

On many levels, the industry continues its tradition of shaping current government response and public exposure to asbestos, he said.

In the United States, despite the known health risks of asbestos exposure, asbestos factories continue to operate, even though 30 countries have banned asbestos manufacturing.

Drawing upon his 30-some years of asbestos research, Castleman gave his Missoula audience a 90-minute crash

course on the history of asbestos in the United States.

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Advertising campaigns were filled with promise and glowing praise for asbestos-made products. "Protect your feet by wearing patent asbestos socks," read one such advertisement.

No one heeded the U.K. Lady Inspectors of Factories, who in 1898 advised against all use of asbestos and described it as having "evil effects ... injurious in any quantity."

It's clear that the industry and health officials looked the other way when asbestos factory workers were dying from asbestos exposure, Castleman said. Production and the quest for profit was unimpeded even when the founder

of Johns-Manville, a leading American manufacturer of asbestos floor covering, died of "phthisis pulmonalis" - asbestosis - in 1898.

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Asbestosis was first named in a medical report in 1927 when 33-year-old woman died from the disease. The last mention of the disease in the largest trade magazine, "Asbestos," was in 1930.

s unknown, he said, and s much reasonable doubt ow he died. webber's skull had es, but there is no way of what killed him. In fact, equent years, animals ed the body and ed the bones. : case comes down to this: ou going to believe Mary ahoon or Mr. Smith?" stal asked the jury. pointed out Bird was and high the night of bber's death, having

told the truth, Hoovestad said. Witnesses for the prosecution on Monday included Dunwebber's wife Wanda. She said her husband was an alcoholic and a methamphetamine abuser who often carried a gun in his waistband for protection or display. On at least one occasion, he fired the gun to defend their home against a drive-by shooting in Arlee. She never reported the incident to authorities because all involved were on probation for previous

and the jury in a barely audible voice. She said she had bronchitis, but she acknowledged she was afraid of testifying. Smith is charged with deliberate homicide, tampering with evidence (by hiding Dunwebber's body) and intimidating a witness, all felonies. The prosecutor is not seeking the death penalty, so Smith's maximum punishment is life in prison with parole should he be convicted. Trial will resume Tuesday at 9 a.m.

## FROM PAGE B1

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blocked an effort to use wildland fire retardant made of asbestos. In 1970, Congress and President Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency, thus bringing an end to the "stone age of occupational health," and a new era of regulation, Castleman said. Still, there were no demands made of the asbestos industry to warn people about using asbestos products, and asbestos sales hit an all-time high in 1973. The EPA did ban products made with "salted asbestos" and some sprayed asbestos items, such as insulation and drywall, but the ban was overturned. Currently, Castleman said, asbestos products are being imported from other countries. American asbestos companies have moved to places like Brazil and India to operate factories, and a bill before Congress that requests the ban of asbestos has garnered the support of Democrats, such as Montana's Sen. Max Baucus. Meanwhile, the EPA has been asked by the asbestos industry to withdraw a booklet

it has produced called "Asbestos Exposure of Brake Mechanics," which cited the dangers of working with the material. Even though the world knows about the vermiculite poisoning that occurred in Libby, production of the material is still taking place in Virginia, Castleman said. Vanderbilt Talc in upstate New York continues to use asbestos in its products. It attracted public outcry in 2000 when it was discovered that Crayola Crayons, which uses the company's product, were made with asbestos. "We have a lot of work to do in terms of tackling this public health problem," Castleman said. "A lot can be done by informing the public and getting the word out." "It's daunting to see the business so entrenched with government," he said. "But if there is a political will to address the issue, it can be done." "This is not a hopeless situation."

## Illnesses linked to Libby vermiculite

l illnesses have been to the mine. Doctors at mos said they were ted to form the Center rmiculite and Asbestos- d Diseases after learning Dearborn factory had sed more than 3 million ls of the mine's mineral ulation and fireproofing. e insulation was used in as 700,000 Michigan homes.

The Dearborn Zonolite/W.R. Grace plant closed in 1990, but federal authorities are investigating contamination connected to it, including who may have been exposed, at what levels, and for how long. It can take up to 40 years after exposure for symptoms of mesothelioma, an asbestos cancer, to appear. Grace operated the mine from 1963 to 1990.

"How many people who were exposed to this insulation actually have any problems related to it?" asked Dr. John Ruckdeschel, Karmanos' director. "What about people who installed it? Or just walked by it? There is no data, no research. So now if somebody asks their internist, they have a number to call."

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# Asbestos

## Continued

By then, the asbestos industry had pulled together and begun a full-throttle effort to spin its image.

In 1934, Castleman said, the practice of "rigging" scientific studies was launched. The asbestos industry would sponsor asbestos research from bonafide science professionals, but once the project concluded and the scientists wrote up their findings, industry lawyers would review the article before publication and take out inflammatory or negative data.

In several cases, the scientist or laboratory that conducted the research was, as part of the sponsorship agreement, not allowed to publish anything without the sponsoring company's approval.

In 1949 and 1953 studies, a scientist named Lanza discovered that asbestos promoted tumors and other diseases, yet those findings were deleted by corporate executives who suppressed the data and

took it out of the published report, Castleman said.

Industry spin was in full stride by the mid-1950s: Ovaltine was sold as a curative for asbestosis in a medical journal advertisement, and asbestos fiber, combined with other material, was promoted as a child-friendly craft material for making jewelry.

A decade later, an American scientist named Selikoff published his findings that showed asbestos-caused diseases were not just an occupational hazard confined to factory workers. Household exposure and neighborhood exposure to the mineral, Selikoff found in 1964, also caused disease.

Despite his findings, in 1965, asbestos dust was used by open-heart surgeons who sprinkled the material over surgical incisions to promote healing by increasing scar tissue. Although the patients survived the surgery, they likely died of asbestosis years later, Castleman said.

But because of Selikoff's work, the California Department of Public Health

blocked an effort to use wildland fire retardant made of asbestos.

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